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Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems Newsletter

November-December 1996

Nebraska IMPACT Project Update

Profitability. Environmentally friendly production. Rural-urban linkages. Getting families involved in farming. These goals — not necessarily in order of importance — belong to four farmers in Adams County, Nebraska. The farmers work as a group to meet their goals. They raise broilers on pasture, Joel Salatin-style. They market the birds around Hastings.

Experience was the teacher for this group in their first year, 1995. The farmers learned how to raise poultry on pasture, how to slaughter and sell the birds, and especially how to work together. Working as a group was essential, they say. The farmers called each other for help when problems came up in raising the birds. They had to cooperate to buy special antibiotic-free poultry feed to supplement what the birds got from pasture. They also bought a portable slaughter facility to share among the group, and they helped each other on slaughtering day at each farm. Customers came out to the farms to buy birds and meet the farmers. In 1995 the farmers were so successful with their enterprise that they had to raise twice as many birds in 1996, and they plan to raise even more in 1997. The group credits their success to the superiority of their product. Customers are pleased with the appearance, cleanliness, and flavor of the birds. And customers like the fact that families are involved in raising the poultry.

Besides working for themselves, the group has taught a few other farmers how to raise and sell pastured poultry. They rent out the portable slaughter facility when they don't need it. The group's long-term vision is to create a sustainable local poultry industry, and they are definitely on their way.

“We have grown faster and accomplished more [together] than we would have trying to work separately.”

Group project member

This group did not come together on its own. The effort of a concerned local Extension educator and the opportunity to join the Nebraska IMPACT Project combined to provide impetus for the group to form. The IMPACT Project

provides minigrants and staff support to small groups of farmers, ranchers, and community members. Groups design projects to address local concerns for sustainable agriculture or community development. A steering committee made up of members of IMPACT groups chooses projects to fund. The idea behind the IMPACT Project is that people can do more together than alone.

Presently the IMPACT Project supports 13 groups across Nebraska. Groups' interests include management-intensive grazing systems, leadership skills for rural women, community gardening, organic grain and vegetable production. And, of course, pastured poultry.

The IMPACT Project is a collaborative effort of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, the Center for Rural Affairs, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The CSAS was instrumental in obtaining the grant from the Kellogg Foundation that initiated the project.

“[IMPACT] is a creative, energizing program with great potential to guide rural development of sustainable farming systems and communities.”

Extension specialist

The deadline for applications for the next round of funding is February 22. For more information, contact the IMPACT Project office at 402/254-2289, ceruaf01@nol.org.

Submitted by Victoria Mundy

North Central Region Evaluates Sustainable Agriculture Training

“I was pleased with the multitude of activities in state training programs and the variety of people coming together to determine direction.”

“People learn differently, and we need a whole array of methods to get the message out.”

These comments surfaced at a joint meeting between the North Central Administrative Council and representatives from state Professional Development Programs (formerly referred to as Chapter 3) in Kansas City on November 17-18. The objectives were to review state and regional programs in sustainable agriculture training and to provide direction for the future. Agenda items included

state reports, a discussion on integrating the different grant programs, and an overview and planning session on the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Training Program (NCSATP). We observed a substantial increase in partnerships with groups outside Extension for designing and delivering sustainable agriculture training.

Monday's discussion focused on one key question: How do we link results from research, producer, and training grants and make sure the information gets out? Rob Myers, director of the national SARE program, announced that a database listing all grants with key words would soon be available. Beyond the technical approach, many participants remarked that more farmers and community members must be involved in the process, with more input from the local level. State sustainable agriculture coordinators reviewed the NCSATP and made recommendations for the next few years. One valuable benefit has been the interaction with people from various backgrounds who are interested in sustainable agriculture. The workshops instilled a sense of community and "recharged batteries" for those people who feel isolated in their daily work environments. Suggested topics for future workshops included:

- Regional curriculum presentation;
- Economic impact for the individual producer;
- Sustainable agriculture and rural community development;
- Showcase of producers who have made a transition to sustainable systems.

The group wanted the workshops to continue to emphasize face-to-face communication, but to use distance technologies where appropriate. Activities may involve moving information on practices to downlink locations, broadcasting farmer interviews, or designing video tours of site-specific demonstrations. We appreciated one administrator's remark, "I've come to respect farmer knowledge—that's a big change for me."

Submitted by Heidi Carter and Charles Francis

Annual Meetings in Nebraska to Showcase Innovative Strategies for Successful Farming

Mark your calendar for the 1997 Annual Meetings of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society and the Nebraska Fruit and Vegetable Growers, to be held February 21-22 in Columbus. Themed Grow Better, Not Bigger, this year's meetings will feature two days of exciting speakers and interesting workshops. Keynote presenters include North Dakota farmer Fred Kirschenmann and Iowa State University rural sociologist Cornelia Butler-Flora. Kirschenmann will

discuss innovative agricultural strategies in light of the future direction of greater economy and market. He will present value-added agriculture and direct marketing approaches for sustaining family farms. Butler-Flora will discuss how different kinds of farming contribute to the economic and environmental well-being of rural communities. She will share her years of research experience in the Midwest.

Workshop topics include biological control of pests in fruits and vegetables, sizing equipment to farming operations, organic gardening, manure management, and raising poultry on pasture.

The event is co-sponsored by the CSAS and the Organic Crop Improvement Association, Nebraska Chapter 3. For more information, call the NSAS at 402-254-2289, or visit the new [NSAS Web page](http://www.netins.net/showcase/nsas) at <http://www.netins.net/showcase/nsas>

USDA Announces Policy Directive Committing Agency to Sustainable Ag

In October USDA announced a new agency-wide policy directive expressing its commitment to sustainable agriculture, based on a Memorandum on Sustainable Development issued by Secretary Dan Glickman. That memorandum supports sustainability throughout the Department's programs, and culminates the year-long work of the 50-member interagency Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, which examined barriers to adopting more sustainable farming methods. It also responds to recommendations from the President's Council on Sustainable Development.

"The purpose of this memorandum is to state the Department's support for policies, programs, activities and education in sustainable development, including sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry and sustainable rural community development, and to establish a mechanism to coordinate these efforts across the Department," the memorandum reads.

"USDA is committed to working toward the economic, environmental and social sustainability of diverse food, fiber, agriculture, forest and range systems. USDA will balance goals of improved production and profitability, stewardship of the natural resource base and ecological systems, and enhancement of the vitality of rural communities."

In its report, "Toward a More Sustainable American Agriculture," the Sustainable Agriculture Working Group identified 33 ways for the USDA to overcome barriers to sustainable agriculture, including:

- Promoting systems-based research and education efforts by developing scholarships for post-graduate research and education programs on sustainable agriculture, continuing support for the SARE program, and establishing awards programs to identify and reward university and Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists who incorporate systems-oriented approaches in their research and education programs.
- Involving producers, especially those with sustainable agriculture expertise, in developing research priorities, making funding decisions, conducting research projects and implementing education efforts based on research results. This might include planning, conducting and evaluating research within the ARS and the National Research Initiative.
- Examining the use of current research reporting mechanisms, such as Current Research Information System (CRIS), for documenting sustainable agriculture research. Where CRIS or other systems are used in research evaluation, such as in the ARS, the use of sustainable agriculture-relevant criteria in project planning and reporting should be considered.
- Encouraging agricultural scientists to include relevance to sustainable agriculture in their research activities, and encourage collaboration on interdisciplinary systems projects.

Secretary Glickman has also established a USDA Council on Sustainable Development to follow up on the recommendations of the Working Group and the President's Council.

Copies of "Toward a More Sustainable American Agriculture" are available from USDA/CSREES/Partnerships, Room 3868 South Bldg., 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250, 202-720-5203.

Source: *Alternative Agriculture News*, November, 1996

Fund for Rural America

It is anticipated that the call for proposals for the new USDA-CSREES program, Fund for Rural America (FRA), will be issued in mid-December, with a probable due date in late February. FRA will focus on practical issues, emphasize multi-disciplinary approaches, integrate teaching, research and extension, and encourage multi-agency and multi-university efforts. General purposes of the FRA program are:

- increase international competitiveness, efficiency, and farm profitability;
- reduce economic and health risks;
- conserve and enhance natural resources;
- develop new crops, new crop uses, and new agricultural applications of biotechnology;
- enhance animal agricultural resources;
- preserve plant and animal germplasm;
- increase economic opportunities in farming and rural communities;
- expand locally owned value-added processing.

CSAS director, Charles Francis, invites you to visit with him about the possibility of developing a proposal for submission through the CSAS. Contact him at 402-472-1581, csas002@unlvm.unl.edu.

Integrated **F**arm

To Graze or Not to Graze?

This is a question asked by farmers who are concerned about the impact of grazing crop residues during the fall and winter on future crop production. While the grazing of corn stalks and sorghum stubble during the winter months is common throughout the Midwest, little information is available on the influence of grazing on subsequent crop yields.

When the Integrated Farm was initiated in 1992 at the University of Nebraska Agricultural Research and Development Center, one of the primary goals was to maximize utilization of resources on the farm, such as crop residues for livestock grazing. Several experiments have been conducted under different environmental conditions during the past three years to determine if winter grazing affects crop yields, soil compaction, and residue cover. Results of these studies show no decrease in crop yields, an increase in surface soil compaction, and a decrease in percent residue cover following fall and winter grazing of crop residues.

Under two center pivot irrigation systems, cows grazed irrigated corn stalks for 60-70 days from late November to early January. One-half of the land under each center pivot was in corn, while the other half was in soybeans, and the following year crops were rotated. Part of the field was left ungrazed for comparison between grazed and ungrazed corn stalks. In the spring soybeans were no-till planted into the corn stalks. Soybean yields were compared for grazed and ungrazed areas in the fall. Irrigated soybean yields were similar for grazed and ungrazed areas each year, averaging 55 bu/ac for both over the three-year period.

Under dryland conditions, the effect of grazing has been investigated in a three-year corn-grain sorghum-soybean rotation. All three crops have been grazed by calves through the winter months and compared to ungrazed areas. These ungrazed areas have been maintained the past four years and will continue to be maintained so any long-term effects of grazing can be identified. The three-year average yields for soybeans, corn and grain sorghum showed no difference between grazed and ungrazed plots.

Other trials investigating the effect of winter crop residue grazing after one to three years show no effects on subsequent crop yields from grazing. These results suggest that if cattle are removed from stalk fields in early March before fields thaw and become muddy, crops should not be affected by grazing. If cattle are allowed to graze later in the spring, tracking caused by cattle may require tillage prior to planting.

Soil bulk density, an indication of soil compaction, was increased on the 0-6" depths in tracks from cattle taken in the spring of the year. Residue cover was reduced as much as 25% in corn, 20% in grain sorghum, and 34% in soybeans following winter grazing compared to ungrazed areas. While these factors did not affect yield, they may affect runoff following significant rainfall on erodible land. A final trial evaluated winter grazing of corn stalks under ridge-till and conventional tillage systems. There has been no consistent effect on corn yields following grazing of stalks after three years. Observations also suggest that ridges can be maintained on a ridge-till system even after being grazed for four years. Ungrazed areas will be maintained in several fields to continue evaluating long-term effects of grazing on crop yields and soil properties.

Submitted by Gary Lesoing

Did You Know...

The Integrated Farm produces 2,500 to 3,000 tons of compost annually to be used on the Agricultural Research and Development farmland.

Ag Production and Nutrition Conference

The International Conference on Agricultural Production and Nutrition will be held in Boston, March 19-21, 1997. Organized by the Tufts University School of Nutrition Science and the Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, this conference will examine all aspects of the relationship between the quality/safety of food and the production systems used to raise it. Besides

biological and technological aspects, the conference will also deal with consumer attitudes, regulatory issues, and agricultural development strategies. Speakers from 15 countries will offer a total of 50 presentations, including reports on new research, reviews of current knowledge and research needs, analysis of conceptual and methodological problems, and discussions of public policy implications. The conference is intended for researchers, farmers, consumer groups, the food processing and marketing industries, and agencies concerned with agricultural policy and public health. For a program summary or a registration form, contact William Lockeretz, 617-627-3223, wlockeretz@infonet.tufts.edu, or the CSAS office.

Resources

Pest Management at the Crossroads. \$29.95 + \$6/\$9 domestic/international s&h. This product of a two-year Consumers Union project will serve as a “roadmap” for a multi-year effort by CU, and hopefully other organizations and institutions, to change the focus of pest management policies, and the direction of public and private investment patterns in new pest management technology and systems. Details about the book and much more can be obtained at the Web site: <http://www.pmac.net>. Phone orders: 301-617-7815; fax orders: 301-206-9789; e-mail orders: pmac@pmds.com; or order from Web site.

Pesticide Runoff and Water Quality. Free. Nebraska Cooperative Extension publication discusses computer model simulations of pesticide runoff, factors influencing pesticide runoff, and suggestions for Best Management Practices. Water Center/Environmental Programs, 103 NRH, Lincoln, NE 68583-0844, 402-472-3305, psis@unlinfo.unl.edu.

Alternatives in Agriculture. \$10. 1996 annual report of research on the Thompson farm in IA. Topics covered include crops, livestock, cover crops, alternative weed management, economics, water quality and soil health. Thompson On-Farm Research, 2035 190th St., Boone, IA 50036-7423, 515-432-1560.

Agroforestry for Farms and Ranches: An introduction to using tree and shrub practices in sustained agricultural systems. Free. Bruce Wight, USDA National Agroforestry Center, East Campus - UNL, Lincoln, NE 68583-0822, 402- 437-5178, ext. 36; Bruce_Wight@ftw.nrcs.usda.gov.

Organic Production: Recent Publications and Current Information Sources. Free. Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, National Agricultural Library, USDA, Room 304, 10301 Baltimore Ave., Beltsville, MD 20705-2351, 301- 504-6559; electronically at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic>.

Growing Together: Community Gardening and Food Security. Free. New handbook covers all the details of establishing a community garden. Other available publications include a complete “how-to” manual for starting a farmers’ market and “Growing Smart,” a compilation of Texas sustainable agriculture success stories. Sustainable Food Center, attn. Garden Guide, 434 Bastrop Hwy, Austin, TX 78741, 1-800-882-5592.

Synergy Magazine. \$22/yr in Canada (+ \$3 to U.S. addresses). Quarterly that publishes stories about organic/sustainable agriculture and related issues based in the western provinces and northern plains states. Synergy Magazine, Box 8803, Saskatoon, Sask., S7K 6S6, synergy@link.ca.

Food Circles: A Bioregional Approach

“Most people have lost contact and lost control of their food systems,” we were told by Rev. Ben Kjelshus of the Kansas City Food Circle at a recent regional workshop. He described the high degree of concentration of food industry business in the hands of a few multinational corporations. Ben offered two illustrations on how we are physically separated from production: (1) an average food molecule travels more than 1000 miles from field to table, and (2) Missouri imports about 70% of its food from outside the borders. Equally important is a cultural separation — people do not know where food comes from nor how it is produced. He contends that a majority of citizens would be more concerned about soil erosion, costs of pesticide contamination, and social impacts of the separation of people from their source of food if they were more aware of how the system works.

The Kansas City Food Circle Project is a “holistic, ecologically based approach in dealing with the food system. It connects farmers, small-scale food producers, retailers, consumers, nutritionists, public advocacy and extension agencies, community activists, and others to work for a sustainable and sensible food system for communities. The mission is to develop an integrated, sustainable, sensible, and just food system that promotes the regional production of food for distribution and consumption primarily within the region. Food circles reclaim our responsibility for and control over our food supply.” Their activities include:

- distribution center that links a cooperative store with Kansas Rural Center growers;
- brochure listing farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) groups;
- monitored hotline and voice mail number to inform consumers about local growers;
- newspaper articles on how to join buying clubs, farmers’ markets, CSAs, and the Circle.

These activities are designed for public education on the environmental and health dimensions of dependence on an industrial food system, increased demand for regionally grown organic food, and promotion of a viable family farm system that results in long-term stewardship of the land.

Summarized by Charles Francis and Heidi Carter

Transformation of Land Grants

“There is a growing recognition of the need for education and research that expand and improve technological options for sustainable production systems that enhance the compatibility of farm profitability, environmental quality, and human communities,” according to a recent report from the National Research Council’s Board on Agriculture. The report summarizes the changing realities of agriculture in the U.S., including higher production levels, more stable productivity, and lower real prices for food to the consumer. It also describes the role of larger corporations in the food system, the impact of concentration of land and resources, and the need for increased relevance in education to deal with change. Of particular interest to our Center was the observation that alternative farming technologies are becoming more widely accepted, and that environmental quality and community viability are important measures of success in the food system. There is growing concern about “food safety, water and air quality, soil/water/energy conservation, wildlife habitat, open space, and (healthy) family farms and rural communities.” The report is summarized in the *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture* (Vol. 11, 1996). Copies of the report, *Colleges of Agriculture at the Land Grant Universities*, are available for \$35 plus \$4 s/h from National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW, Lockbox #285, Washington DC 20005.

Summarized by Charles Francis

Richard Olson Named Presidential Fellow

Agronomy graduate student Richard Olson, who works with CSAS director Charles Francis on several projects, was named a Presidential Graduate Fellow for the 96-97 academic year. Richard designed the curriculum for and coordinated the farming systems student intern program, and co-designed a new agroecology course which he helped teach last spring. He was senior editor of *Exploring the*

Role of Diversity in Sustainable Agriculture, published last year by the American Society of Agronomy, as well as author or co-author of three chapters in the book. Richard is helping to develop a series of regional workshops on ecological design of future farming systems. He has also edited or written four previous books and numerous technical reports and publications. Thank you for your contributions to sustainable agriculture, Richard!

Coming Events

Contact CSAS office for more information:

Jan. 28-Feb. 2 — North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference: Albuquerque, NM
 Feb. 6 - 7 — Farmer-Led Watershed Initiatives Conference, Mankato, MN
 Feb. 19-23 — World Aquaculture 97, Seattle, WA
 Feb. 21-22 — Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society and the Nebraska Fruit and Vegetable Growers annual meetings, Columbus, NE
 Mar. 12-14 — Cover Crops, Soil Quality and Ecosystems Conference, Sacramento, CA
 Mar. 19-21 — International Conference on Ag Production and Nutrition, Boston, MA
 June 8-12/15-19 — XVIII International Grassland Congress '97, Winnipeg, Manitoba/Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
 June 25-28 — [3rd International Interdisciplinary Conference on the Environment, Boston, MA](#)
 July 23-26 — Soil and Water Conservation Society Annual Conference (focusing on ecosystem management within watersheds), Toronto, Ontario

The Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems bimonthly newsletter is currently available free in hard copy to U.S. addresses, and electronically via: SANET and PENPages. Current and back issues, along with other sustainable agriculture information is also available on the Internet:

<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/csas/>

For comments or questions, or to be added to the mailing list for hard copy, contact the editor at the masthead address, or e-mail csas001@unlvm.unl.edu.

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